

Travel Journeys Spain 2012

Escorted 14 days / 13 nights
Departing Barcelona - May 3, 2012



Day 1 – Thursday, May 3 - Barcelona

Our Spanish adventure commences in wonderful Barcelona. With typical Catalan pride and creativity Barcelona remains determined to project itself as Spain's most innovative city.

Our specialist guide joins us for a walking tour which offers more than just a glimpse of a city which was reborn with the 1992 Olympics.

The tour takes us to the Passeig de Gracia, the most stylish street of Barcelona, lined with boutique shops and art galleries. La Rambla, with its outdoor cafes, flower stands, exotic birds and equally colourful street performers.

Just off La Rambla are the antique stalls at La Boqueria, Barcelona's outdoor market considered to be one of the best markets in the world. Barcelona's Gothic Quarter rests on the ancient Roman city of Barcino, today full of buildings from the 13th to the 15th centuries. The Quarter is full of interesting shapes, peaceful plazas and winding alleyways, with its medieval Cathedral and the Picasso Museum.

The remainder of the day is at your leisure. Our guide will assist with suggestions.

This evening we meet for a "welcome" dinner to get to know our fellow tour members and enjoy Barcelona by night.

(B, D)

Day 2 – Friday, May 4 - Barcelona

We have a special treat today as we join our chef for a visit to the Market of Sant Josep: La Boqueria to buy the fresh food we will use to cook our lunch. The market itself is an experience. Its history is entwined with the city's history, families, popular traditions and celebrations. Many of the present stall owners are third and fourth generation. They are the union of the past with the present. This is all part of our cooking experience as we learn about the produce of the market, cooking in Spain and especially Cataluña. The beauty of this experience is learning and enjoying the delights of Catalan food as we sit down to lunch and savour the fruits of our labour.

Evening at leisure.

(B, L)

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Day 3- Saturday, May 5 - Barcelona –Girona & Costa Brava

This morning we join our guide and driver for a full day tour north to Girona and the Costa Brava.

The province of Girona lies in the northeast of Spain, bordering France and the Catalan provinces of Barcelona and Lleida. The most striking characteristic of this historic area of north Catalunya is undoubtedly its great diversity - internationally acclaimed beaches, spectacular mountains of the Pyrenees, a rugged rocky coastline reaching up to the French border, and the green rolling hills of rural Girona.

Girona's history dates back to the Roman era, and the town is full of magnificent monuments, museums and archives. Successive rulers have left a mix of architecture in Girona ranging from the Gothic cathedral to the beautiful 12th century Arab baths. Our guide will lead us through the winding medieval alleyways of Girona. Girona's Call, the old Jewish Quarter, was home to a prosperous community until the end of the 15th century.

After lunch we travel to Figueres, Salvador Dalí's hometown. Here we visit the Dalí Theatre-Museum, designed by the artist himself. It contains a broad range of works spanning his career. In the museum, the highlights include a stage set featuring large mannequins, a long black Cadillac with sprinklers inside, and a salon that uses furniture to recreate Mae West's face (with a sofa fashioned like soft red lips). Dalí himself is buried in a crypt here, next to a series of gold cobra statues.

(B)

Day 4 – Sunday, May 6 - Barcelona-Córdoba

Sadly we farewell Barcelona this morning and board the AVE Train south to the heart of Andalusia and one of Spain's oldest cities, Cordoba.

While the rest of Europe was languishing during the Dark Ages, southern Spain, al-Andalus, thrived. Its scholars - Christian, Muslim and Jew - created a society that became the safeguard of Greek and Roman learning. As the capital of el-Andalus until its fall in 1236, Cordoba was a city of half a million people, with thousands of mosques and the first street-lighting in Europe. Students and merchants flocked to Cordoba from all over Europe, Africa and even Asia. Its libraries boasted hundreds of thousands of volumes, its palaces and baths were renowned for their opulence and its luxury goods were coveted all over Europe.

After checking in to our hotel in the centre of Cordoba we are met by our expert local guide for a stroll through the medieval streets of the old town to visit one of the most magnificent of all Islamic buildings, the city's mesmerising Mezquita Mosque or Grand Mosque, Dating from 785, the Mosque is so massive that it contains a Catholic Cathedral within it. It is one of the world's best-known pieces of religious architecture.

Evening at leisure

(B)

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Day 5 – Monday, May 7 - Córdoba – Granada

We have time this morning to revisit some of the sights from yesterday before boarding our train to Granada, home to the magnificent Alhambra.

In the early evening we take in the magnificent view of the Alhambra Palaces. As twilight falls, the sun casts its brilliant hues on this amazing piece of history. The back drop for this wonderful scene is the Sierra Nevada mountain range.

From here we walk through the winding cobbled streets of the Albaicín, a truly fascinating neighborhood of Granada which, to this day preserves many facets of its Moorish heritage. Our guide will tell you about the past, present and future of this district as you stroll some of its most character filled streets and squares.

At the end of the walk we stop at a couple of typical local bars. In Granada it is the tradition for each drink to be accompanied by a small snack, the tapa. Not only is this a great introduction to the cuisine, but it also gives us an insight into the local culture. Much of the social life revolves around tapeando – going out for drinks and tapas.

(B, Tapas Dinner)

Day 6 – Tuesday, May 8 - Granada

This morning we visit the jewel of Granada the Alhambra, Generalife and Gardens. This is an idyllic refuge of palaces, gardens, flowers, mosaics and fountains. We visit the Alcazaba, Royal Palaces, Palatial gardens, Generalife Palace and the Palace of Carlos V, a Renaissance jewel within the Alhambra.

With our expert guide, we go beyond the text in our guide book and discover a fascinating world that was home to the Nasrid sultans, rulers of the last Spanish Moorish kingdom. The remainder of the day is at leisure to discover or rediscover more delights of Granada or linger longer in the Alhambra.

Evening will be at leisure.

(B)



View of the Alhambra from the Albacyin

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Day 7 – Wednesday, May 9 - Granada-Ronda

Today we continue our travels to Ronda by coach. This intriguing town lies on top of a rocky escarpment divided by the deep El Tajo gorge. Above the gorge is the famous 18th century Puente Nuevo 'new' bridge straddling the 100m chasm below and many spectacular views out over the Serranía de Ronda Mountains. Ronda is also famous as the birthplace of modern bullfighting and home to one of the oldest bullrings in Spain.

Our accommodation is in the town centre, in a privileged position next to Ronda's famous Puente Nuevo Bridge, built in 1761 our Hotel occupies the former Town Hall. The impressive setting has spectacular views of the 'Cut', a river gorge 120 metres deep. The interior is decorated in blues, greens, yellows and reds, with brightly coloured fabrics on the sofas and curtains, and large, light rooms.

Dinner will be served at the Parador's restaurant
(B), (D)

Day 8 – Thursday, May 10 - Ronda-Pueblos Blancos - Sevilla

After Breakfast we leave Ronda, and travel to Sevilla. On our way we explore two of the most beautiful White Villages.

First you will visit the town of Grazalema along one of the most spectacular roads in Spain. Grazalema is located in a high valley over 800m in the Sierra del Endrinal and dominated by the magnificent rocky outcrop known as Peñon Grande. The pretty mountain village of Grazalema is most popular base for visitors to the Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park. The steep cobbled streets of Grazalema are immaculately kept and lined by whitewashed houses with windows covered by wrought-iron rejas and plant pots spilling over with colourful flowers.

From Grazalema we drive on to one of Andalusia's most dramatically positioned pueblos blancos (white villages), Arcos de la Frontera. Balanced atop a rocky limestone ridge, its whitewashed houses and stone castle walls stop abruptly as a sheer cliff face plunges down to the fertile valley of the river Guadalete below.

Declared a national historic-artistic monument in 1962 in recognition of its exceptional architecture and impressive location, the old town is a tangled labyrinth of cobbled streets that lead up to a sandstone castle, the Castillo de los Arcos. As you'd expect from such a spectacular vantage point, there are exhilarating views over the town and the rolling plain below.

After exploring the two villages we stop at one of the best restaurants in the area sampling the fine local food including local cheese, soups, charcuterie, lamb, wild boar etc. There will be time to stroll around the village before travelling on to Sevilla.

Our elegant hotel in Sevilla has the questionable distinction of being the first resting-place for the American Indians that Columbus brought back. The hotel is located in the Jewish Santa Cruz Quarter, one of the most charming neighbourhoods in Sevilla.

(B, L)

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Day 9 – Friday, May 11 - Sevilla

The capital of Andalucia, Seville is a captivating and beautiful city. It is the city of flamenco, bulls, Carmen and Don Juan; its history and culture give rise to pride, tradition, passion and joy. It comprises enchanting neighbourhoods with twisting narrow streets, stunning patios and squares lined with orange trees.

Our tour this morning includes the enormous cathedral, the largest Gothic building in the world, featuring the tomb of Christopher Columbus and its 12th-century bell-tower, La Giralda, originally built by the Moors as a minaret.

We visit the ornately decorated Alcazar Palace and its Andalusian gardens. Originally a Moorish palace, it was re-built and designed by Mudejar craftsmen for the Christian royalty after the expulsion of the Moors.

This afternoon is free to revisit some of the sights from this morning in more depth or to explore new adventures. Wander through the Barrio de Santa Cruz: originally the Jewish Quarter and now the prettiest quarter of Sevilla. Visit the Murillo Gardens, a typical Sevillian garden full of arcades and foliage.

This evening we enjoy a traditional Flamenco Show.

(B)



La Giralda

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Day 10 – Saturday, May 12 - Sevilla-Madrid

We leave southern Spain and the delights of Andalusia to travel north on the AVE train bound for Spain's capital Madrid.

After check in at our beautiful centrally located hotel we meet our expert local guide for a walking tour of this wonderful city.

The inhabitants of Madrid call their city, La Villa, the “village” and in many areas it still retains the feel of a village. However, it is definitely a spectacular “village”. It is a bustling modern city with a refined cultural heart while still providing ample opportunity for enjoying the good life of Madrid with its many beautiful boutiques, restaurants and Tapas bars.

Our walking tour includes some of the capital's most impressive sights, such as the Plaza de Oriente and the historic quarter including the 17th-century Plaza Mayor, a wonderful Baroque square lined with arcades filled with picturesque cafes.

We walk through the peaceful Plaza de la Villa where the City Hall stands and the narrow streets of Madrid of the “Austrias”, named after the Austro-Hapsburg dynasty which came to rule over in 1516. Much of the Austrias neighbourhood today is a gastronomic centre, with traditional favourites aplenty, including the famous Botin, the oldest restaurant in the world.

The nuns of the Convent nearby occasionally offer their home made cakes too!

This evening is free for individual adventure or perhaps joining with other group members for a visit to the popular Madrid tapas bars.

(B)



The Royal Palace Madrid

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Day 11 – Sunday, May 13 - Madrid

Madrid is home to three of the world's best art galleries – the Prado, the Reina Sofia and the Thyssen. This morning we begin our “cultural” day with a guided tour of the Prado - home to the works of many famous European artists but importantly home to the extensive works of the wonderful Spanish artists Goya, El Greco and Velázquez.

Our expert guide will take you by the hand and lead you through these magnificent galleries. The collections are so vast and inspiring they can overwhelm. Our expert will show you the most significant and unique pieces from each era and artist.

Depending on your tastes you may wish to extend your visit of the Prado or continue on to visit the Thyssen or Reina Sofia Galleries which are nearby.

The remainder of the day is at your leisure. Our guide can assist with suggestions.

(B)

Day 12 – Monday, May 14 - Madrid-Toledo-Madrid

This morning we embark on a full day tour to the walled town of Toledo with its winding streets and medieval buildings. Although now completely overshadowed by nearby Madrid, it is Toledo and its narrow, winding streets and steps, stone houses and churches that embody Spain's past.

In the Middle Ages, Toledo was built on a “convergence” of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, and contains two of the remaining medieval Spanish synagogues. We visit El Tránsito, a 13th century synagogue and the adjoining Jewish Museum, devoted to the history and legacy of Jewish Spain. At the centre of Toledo, is the soaring Gothic cathedral. Its Sacristy contains many paintings by El Greco, Van Dyck and Goya, plus an impressive collection of medieval garments and textiles.

We stop at the church of Santo Tomé, to marvel at El Greco's famed Burial of the Count of Orgaz, considered to be El Greco's finest work. The Museum of El Greco contains an extensive collection of the former Toledo resident's paintings – including more of his most famous ones.

(B)

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Day 13 – Tuesday, May 15 - Madrid – Segovia – El Escorial -Madrid

We leave Madrid today to enjoy some of the surrounding countryside with a visit to the charming Romanesque town of Segovia with its towering Roman Aqueduct.

UNESCO has recognised the importance of the old city and Aqueduct by naming it a World Heritage site. We travel the winding roads of this lovely town with a private walking tour which also includes the Alcazar Palace. This Palace has undergone many reincarnations over the centuries. Originally a fortress, it was also a Military College and a Royal Palace.

Lunch will be at a unique restaurant in the lovely town of Segovia.

On our return journey to Madrid we visit the El Escorial Monastery which was originally built as a palace by Felipe II of Spain. It is also the burial site of many of the Spanish monarchs of the last five centuries as well housing some amazing works of art. Our last stop is the Fallen Valley which was constructed by General Franco to honour those who died in the Spanish civil War. Franco himself is also buried here.

We return to Madrid in the late afternoon for our “farewell dinner”.

(B, L)

Day 14 – Wednesday, May 16 - Madrid – Departure

This morning we go our separate ways either to continue our adventures in other places or to continue to enjoy the delights of Spain.

(B)



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Costs and Additional Details

Enquiries :	<i>Please contact Travel Journeys +61 (0)400 697 635 for additional information</i>
Starts :	<i>Departing Barcelona 3 May 2012</i>
Finishes:	<i>In Madrid 16 May 2012.</i>
Group Size:	<i>14 maximum</i>
Price	<i>\$AUD 5,950.00 per person from Barcelona – subject to change.</i>
Accommodation	<i>Hotels used are 3½ and 4 star</i>
Singles	<i>Subject to conditions – we will advise if there is another tour member wishing to share twin accommodation. Limited single room accommodation available on request for an additional cost.</i>

Tour Inclusions

- Meals** *As listed in Itinerary - All Breakfasts. Lunches and Dinners as noted.*
- Services** *An Australian Tour Manager and a Registered English speaking Spanish guide
Plus Expert local guides*
- Fees** *Excursions and Tours (As per Itinerary)
All Entrance Fees (As per Itinerary) unless otherwise noted*
- Costs** *Based on Share Twin/Dbf room
Single cost option subject to availability of single rooms.*

Tour Exclusions

- Meals** *Other than those listed in Itinerary*
- Tips** *It is custom to tip both the Guide and the Driver. Guidelines will be advised with departure documents.*
- Airfares** *Group Airfare is available for those departing Australia on the group departure date if there are sufficient numbers. Alternatively we can assist with the airfare most suited to your needs.*
- Option** *Stopover available on return journey - please ask for costing.*
- Misc.** *Items of a personal nature such as laundry, dry cleaning, personal accident and medical expenses, incidental expenses, taxi fares where not part of a regular transfer, telephone and internet communication charges, excess baggage.*